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# The International Labor Situation

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**B**BROADLY speaking there are two important aspects to the present international labor problem. The first is definite, concrete and immediate. It has to do principally with the formulation and adoption of certain labor standards, agreement as to which has slowly developed through the medium of international conferences and discussions by socialist organizations, labor unionists and other agencies during the years preceding the war. The conferences which have recently been held directly or indirectly in connection with the Peace Conference have finally resulted in the crystallization and formal announcement of these standards.

The other feature of the international labor problem while more intangible and remote is in reality far more significant and is fraught with more far-reaching consequences. It shows clearly the development of a change in the fundamental attitude of labor towards industry in general. It carries with it a more or less definitely developed program of constructive action which contemplates extreme modification or revolutionary change in the relations between industrial workers and industrial institutions and between the state and industry.—It holds forth the hope of a more complete democracy which is to be attained both by the use of political action and by the exercise of economic power or pressure.

## BACKGROUND OF THE PRESENT MOVEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL LABOR STANDARDS

International action affecting labor has in past years taken shape in (1) international socialistic organization; (2) formation of international trade union bodies; (3) establishment of semi-public and private associations of students and workers interested in social and political reforms; (4) official conferences and treaties. The non-official trade union and socialist organizations have formed the background of the official phases of the movement. They have developed the motives for the action taken and have

supplied the political and economic sanction to the international labor movement.

### INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

The Socialist Internationale is the present organized expression of the international socialist movement. It dates formally from 1864 when Karl Marx and a group of radicals organized the International Workingmen's Association. This association continued active for less than ten years, but was revived in 1889. Its latest International Congress was held at Copenhagen in 1910 at which delegates from thirty-three nations were present. The earlier association held seven conferences. The revived organization has held nine international congresses.

The International Socialist Bureau, with headquarters at Brussels, was established in 1900, and is the permanent organization of the national delegates. The so-called international secretaries have met annually or more frequently since 1904. The executive committee is composed of Belgian socialists.

Both industrial and political reforms are on the program of the Internationale. The resolutions of the 1910 Congress may be taken as typical of its demands of this international socialist movement.

- (1) A maximum workday of eight hours.
- (2) Prohibition of work of children under fourteen years.
- (3) Prohibition of night work except when necessary.
- (4) Uninterrupted rest of thirty-six hours once a week as a minimum for all workers.
- (5) Unrestricted right of free combination and association.
- (6) Inspection of working conditions by authorized agencies upon which labor is represented.

In the political field the Congress has demanded ultimate complete disarmament and the abolition of secret diplomacy.

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNIONISM

The international workingmen's movement has developed contemporaneously with the international socialist movement. The first general trade union congress was held in Paris in 1886, and a larger and more important one in Zurich in 1897. In 1912 about thirty trades were organized internationally, the largest

and most important being the metal workers and the miners, each of which had over a million members. In 1913 the international secretaries of these various international craft organizations met at Zurich for the first time. The respective trades or crafts had hitherto been holding their independent conferences. This joint meeting of the secretaries, or secretariats as the offices are termed, was another move in the direction of greater unity in purpose and action of the trade union movement. Principally the conference hoped to bring about a closer association between the International Trades Secretariats and the International Secretariat which represented the various trades and federations.

Purely trade union activities, as distinguished from political action, have absorbed the attention of the international craft federations. All of them have favored the eight-hour day. The miners have advocated the nationalization of mines. Transportation workers, dock laborers, and seamen advocate the nationalization of the railroads and the means of production. It has, as a whole, represented the more prudent and conservative elements of the trade-union movement.

The International Secretariat mentioned above is the central executive organ of the International Federation of Trade Unions. It was organized in 1898. Before the war twenty-nine national trade union federations were affiliated with it, together with the six federations in the States of the Commonwealth of Australia, or altogether thirty-five affiliated federations. In addition thirty-two craft federations were part of the International Federation. It claimed before the war an affiliated membership of approximately 7,500,000. Eight international conferences have been held—the last one before the war, at Zurich, and one during the war, at Berne, October 1-4, 1917.

#### INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS FOR LABOR

Besides the political and trade-union organizations which the workman himself has built up internationally, individuals outside the labor movement have organized various international bodies which have concerned themselves in the cause of labor reform and regulation. These are composed of economists and interested workers in the field of labor reform. Among the associations of the kind may be mentioned the International Congress on Occupa-

tional Diseases; International Association on Unemployment; Permanent International Committee on Social Insurance; International Association for the Protection of Native Labor; and the International Association for Labor Legislation. The latter is the most important. It was formed in Paris in 1900 by a group of economists who met at the time of the Paris Exposition of that date. In 1901 a permanent international labor office was organized. The office has a semi-official character as it is supported by contributions voted by the various countries represented in the association. While twenty-five countries have established national branches of the International Association only fourteen contribute to its support funds voted from the respective public treasuries. Seven conferences have been held by the association, the latest at Zurich in 1912 in which twenty-two countries participated. Various delegates' meetings have been held between sessions of the more formal conferences.

This International Association for Labor Legislation has been closely and influentially associated with the drafting and preparation of international labor conventions and treaties. It has published studies and outlined policies in such matters as the prohibition of the night work of women and children, use of the dangerous white or yellow phosphorus in match manufacturing, administration of labor laws, protection of workmen from accident and disease, weekly rest day, and hours of labor in continuous industries. The most recent action of the association was the submission in June, 1918, of a memorandum requesting the incorporation in the final peace treaty which will formally terminate the World War of a program of international labor legislation. It was proposed that the international labor office should be made the official agency for the enforcement of the international labor standards which it was hoped would become a part of the future organization of the nations.

#### OFFICIAL INTERNATIONAL ACTION PRIOR TO THE WAR

As the result of the activities primarily of the International Association for Labor Legislation as well as of favorable official support on the part of certain European governments, a number of international conferences were held before the war and various labor treaties were entered into between different countries. Al-

together there have been signed thirty bipartite agreements affecting twelve European countries and four non-European states or colonies. Two polypartite treaties were signed as a result of the Berne conferences of 1906. The treaties or agreements entered into by the various nations fall into three groups or classes: (1) Those affecting the movement of labor, i.e., emigration and immigration conventions; (2) those respecting equality or reciprocity of treatment of native and alien labor; and (3) those providing for uniform labor standards in the signatory countries.

The treaties, falling into that class which aim to accord to alien workmen the advantages of the labor legislation of the country to which they migrate, were, before the war twenty-seven in number, four being savings bank agreements, four social insurance conventions, and nineteen having to do with accident insurance. Thus this group of treaties covers the larger part of all international agreements. The savings bank agreements permit citizens of one country to transfer deposits without charge from the savings banks of the other country. Social and accident insurance treaties make applicable to resident alien workmen the terms of the laws of the country of their employment or grant to alien dependents of native workmen the benefits of the law of the country of their employment or grant to alien dependents of native workmen the benefits of the law of the country of the alien workman entitled to benefits under such law.

Besides the above savings banks and insurance conventions, and belonging in the class of treaties granting equality of treatment of native and alien workmen in various countries are two special treaties entered into between France and Italy and between France and Denmark. The former, ratified as of June 10, 1910, provides reciprocal protection of children under the labor and educational laws of the countries; the latter ratified August 9, 1911, subjects to arbitration every issue raised between the countries concerning their respective labor laws.

Treaties which have affected labor standards in the adhering countries have been more difficult of negotiation. In fact only two such agreements are in force, namely, those relating to the prohibition of the night work of women and of the use of white or yellow phosphorus in matches. Both of these were signed at Berne, September 26, 1906. Thirteen European countries sub-

scribed to the agreement to prohibit, with certain exceptions, the night work of women. It provided that night work in industrial employment should be prohibited for all women without distinction of age within certain exceptions. Eleven hours constitutes the necessary period of night rest including the period 10 p. m. to 5 a. m. The treaty as to the prohibition of phosphorus in manufacturing matches although originally signed by only seven countries has practically become effective throughout the world.

#### PROPOSALS FOR LABOR PARTICIPATION IN THE PEACE CONFERENCE

After Europe had become involved in war, discussion of the way in which voice should be given to organized labor opinion regarding the final treaty of peace centered around two proposals: (1) for a labor and socialist conference at the same time and place as the Peace Conference; (2) for labor representation in the peace delegations of each of the countries participating in the settlement.

The first proposal was made originally by the American Federation of Labor at its annual convention in 1914, and specified that the conference should be international. The Canadian Trades Union Congress and the French Confederation Generale du Travail both indorsed the American proposal after a considerable lapse of time, but other allied labor groups preferred an inter-allied instead of an international meeting. The British Trades Union Congress in 1916 voted 2 to 1 against the American motion, but in 1917 the Congress not only voted that an international conference was a necessary preliminary to peace, but in October, 1918, joined with the British Labor Party in making a formal request of the British government for permission to attend such a conference.

The principle of an inter-allied conference was indorsed by both inter-allied conferences held in London in 1918. The February conference appointed a commission to organize delegates to the conference.

The second proposal, namely, for labor representation in the various peace delegations, was first urged by the American Federation of Labor at its 1916 convention. The Berne conference of October, 1917, framed a resolution asking for the participa-

tion of trade union representatives in the consideration of social and economic questions at the Peace Conference. The Confederation Generale du Travail and the Inter-Allied Labor and Socialist Conference of February, 1918, have each voted for labor representation at the peace table. The British Labor Party and the Trades Union Congress also requested the British government to include an official representative of labor in the peace delegation. A similar request was made to the French government.

The most conspicuous definition of allied war aims by labor was furnished by the Memorandum on War Aims framed by the British Labor Party and the Trades Union Congress jointly. The war aims were originally drawn up by a subcommittee of the national executive of the Labor Party, consisting of Arthur Henderson, Ramsay MacDonald, F. W. Jowett, G. H. Roberts, George J. Wardle, and Sidney Webb. They were presented to the Inter-Allied Labor and Socialist Conference in London, August, 1917, but agreement on the terms was not reached and a standing committee was appointed to give further consideration to the memorandum. The following month the Trades Union Congress and the Labor Party joined forces in the task of bringing about a general agreement of war aims among the working classes of the allied nations. The aims were revised, and after approval by the national committees of the two bodies, were presented to Premier Lloyd George as the opinion of the organized workers of Great Britain. The memorandum was accepted by the Labor Party in conference on January 23-25, 1918, and by labor representatives of the allied nations in conference on February 20-23, 1918.

#### THE LABOR COMMISSION OF THE PEACE CONFERENCE

With the assembling of the Peace Conference in Paris, a Commission on International Labor Legislation was designated. Its president was Samuel W. Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor. Among its other members were the prominent Belgian socialist, Mr. Emile Vandervelde, minister of justice in the Belgian government; Mr. George M. Barnes, former labor member of the British War Cabinet, representing England; and M. Colliard, minister of labor in the French Cabinet. The commission began its sittings early in February and issued its report on March 5, 1919.—During this period a labor and socialist



conference was also held at Berne with socialist representatives from Austria and Germany present, and an elaborate series of recommendations issued.

### THE REPORT OF THE LABOR COMMISSION

The report of the Labor Commission of the Peace Conference practically constitutes a demand that an international labor charter shall be included in the peace treaty. The draft, as adopted by the commission is principally based upon the British proposals.

The commission's report demands the adherence of the powers signatory of the treaty of peace, to the Berne 1906 international convention's resolutions forbidding night work for women employed in industry, and the use of white phosphorus in match industry; it promulgates the reforms adopted at the Berne 1913 conference, and intrusts the international labor conference, provided for in the report, with the realization of a series of reforms, which briefly analyzed are as follows:

1. No children under fifteen years of age to be employed in industry;
2. Young people's employment to be subject to a number of other regulations mentioned;
3. Limitation of the working day for workers to eight hours in factories and mines;
4. Saturday half-holiday to be introduced into all countries;
5. Weekly rest of at least thirty-six hours, taken from Saturday to Monday, to be allowed;
6. All laws and orders dealing with the protection of workers to apply in general to home industries;
7. Social insurance laws shall be extended to home industries;
8. Special protection and insurance for motherhood is provided, and women are not to be employed in mines or dangerous trades;
9. Women are to receive equal pay with men for the same work;
10. An international schedule of deleterious materials, which are to be prohibited, shall be kept;
11. Railway cars of all countries must, within five years, be fitted with automatic couplers adaptable to all cars;
12. Medical inspection of persons employed in home industries is to be arranged, and inspection of dwelling houses;
13. No hindrance is to be put to the free combination and association of workers in all countries and the infringement of this rule is to be made a punishable offense;
14. Foreign workers shall have the right to wages and conditions of work

- agreed to between the trade unions and employers of trade. Failing such agreements, foreign workers shall have the right to wages customary in the locality;
15. There is to be no prohibition of emigration or of immigration in a general way, this rule not to affect the right of the state to restrict immigration temporarily in a period of economic depression or for the protection of public health;
  16. The state shall be free to enforce a certain standard of education;
  17. Wages boards with equal representation of employers and workers shall be set up by the governments for the fixing of the legal minimum rates of wages in cases where collective agreements between the workers' trade union and employers have proved impossible;
  18. Unemployment is to be provided against by the linking up of the existing labor exchanges so that information can be provided with regard to the demand and supply of labor;
  19. Unemployment insurance shall be established in all countries, as well as state insurance against industrial accidents;
  20. A special code of law for the protection of seamen is also to be established.

Labor departments of each state, and their industrial inspectors, shall in the first place be responsible for the establishment of these international standards, but for the more effective carrying out of the treaty and the further protection of international labor regulations, the contracting states are required to set up a permanent commission consisting equally of representatives of the states which are members of the League of Nations and the International Trade Union Federation. It shall be the duty of this commission to call yearly conferences of representatives of the contracting states for the purpose of promoting industrial labor legislation. The conference is clothed with power to adopt binding regulations within the range of its powers. The stipulation is further made that at least half of the voting members of an annual conference shall consist of the representatives of the organized workers of each country. The adoption of these proposals, as can be readily seen, would have a far-reaching effect upon the labor standards of some of the countries involved.—They would also result in more nearly equalizing international competitive conditions in industry. The provision for annual conferences with power to issue binding regulations would also add to the guarantee of their general acceptance and application.

## FUNDAMENTAL INTERNATIONAL TENDENCIES

Aside from the adoption of these far-reaching international standards, the international labor situation is also characterized by certain fundamental tendencies which are even more significant.—The most revolutionary expression of this general movement is to be found in the actual attempt of the Soviet Republic in Russia to socialize or nationalize land and industry and the announced intention of the new German and Hungarian governments to adopt a modified program of the same general character.—In Great Britain the same tendency has also become manifest although in a much more conservative form.—In the United States a program of like import is being advocated and the same fundamental tendency is observable.

## A PEACEFUL REVOLUTION IN ENGLAND

The course of events in England may be accepted as an index of the general tendency in industrial relations in the other great countries of the Western world. There, indeed, the determination of the workers upon real democracy, equal industrially and politically, is effecting a revolution of the system. But it is, in a remarkable sense, a peaceful revolution. Nowhere and in no period, marked by the abandonment or overthrow of established custom or vested authority, has a government or the powerful groups within its domain displayed with such emphatic success the superiority of brains over bullets in the bridging of a crisis.

To the outside world, the situation in England has been a threatening one since the beginning of the war. The signing of the armistice signalled, it seemed, the inception of civil strife, but the quality of common sense had been so widely diffused, not only among the parties to the industrial equation but also among those in whose hands rest the delegated political power, that the menace of a destructive industrial conflict has been actually made the vehicle for a national and coöperative endeavor so to reconstruct the system as to meet and go with the tide of sentiment and conviction for a drastic change. Instead of a period of fruitless sabotage and open warfare, suspending production and impoverishing the nation, the British effort has proceeded so far as to justify the statement that, in peace, the will to war has been overcome by reason and the relations of what were prospective enemies so read-

justed as to indicate that industry is at the dawn of a new day—the day of 100 per cent of possible production.

Unquestionably, the outstanding fact in the current readjustment in England is that industrial self-government has been established. Control of the lives of the industrial collectivity by absentee capitalists has given way to machinery for, if not actual exercise of, control from within by joint action of management and employer. The arbitrary authority of the exploiter has succumbed to the will of the mass for participation in the decisions. This has been accomplished, first, by the organized and enlightened desire of the workers and, second, by the readiness of government and employers to see in that desire, not a heresy to be put down by force of arms and ruinous lockouts, but a clue to an inevitable new chapter in the history of human progress.

On the other hand, an amazing switch of attitude on the part of the organized workers toward the question of production has been observed. In a comparatively short time old and almost ingrained ideas of restrictions on output have been discarded in favor of an intelligent awareness that production is the only measure of the return upon industrial effort and the indications are for a harmonious coördination of brains and brawn toward every ounce of production of which the machine is capable.

There has been a mutual change of heart among employers and workers with respect to organization. Employers, once the hated enemies of the workers in their efforts to band together, now as a rule, do not see evil in labor unionism and, indeed, express a desire to see the workers fully organized. The opposition of workers to federations of employers, once considered a piratical attempt to enslave the mass by concentrating a class, is gone. In its place is a wish to have all employers organized so that all of the workers and all of the employers may work hand in hand. This summary deliberately ignores the radical, and powerless, minority which would smash all and reconstruct a new society, for the reason that the importance of this minority, by this time, must be admitted to be inconsiderable.

At the suggestion of the government (the Whitley Commission) employers and workers are forming, above the shop and plant groups, councils, representative of both sides, to govern entire industries and, above that, industry as a whole, on the basis of

principles guaranteeing full justice to every individual, the right of every family to a fixed minimum standard of living, the right of every worker to sufficient opportunity for the pursuit of spiritual and intellectual satisfaction.

Through the machinery of an industrial parliament, all of the elements of society in England have come together in agreement upon the application of certain rights, already conceded in principle. On April 5, 1919, this Parliament, comprising 800 representatives, approved the program of its sub-committee calling for the formation of a national industrial council, universal operation of industry on the basis of a forty-eight-hour week, a universal minimum wage, maintenance of unemployed, and raising of the age of child workers.

That the manner in which the government, the employers and the constituted leaders of organized labor have collaborated during the past six months has the whole-hearted approval of the mass of workers is not to be doubted. Particularly, is this believed to be correct in view of certain developments since the signing of the armistice. All England looked for industrial strife. Qualified persons, excellent observers no longer discussed what was going to happen. They had reached the second stage and were speculating upon the forms the revolution would take. Some had predicted that the trade union officials would be torn from their places of authority and strong rebels given the mandate to lead the working-class conquest. What actually happened was that the revolution was started but never finished. As a bud too early in the spring it lived a brief day. The workers' council in Belfast mimicking the Russian development swayed to and fro and then fell dead. The revolt on the Clyde had been expected and happened and ceased to happen. Glasgow underwent a spell of frenzy. Down in London the underground railwaymen tied the city up for awhile. But the mass of the workers held aloof. Nevertheless, there came a day when affairs seemed serious. The Triple Alliance, comprising the miners, the railway workers and the transport workers, presented demands, the rejection of which, it was officially stated, meant a general strike, paralyzing, and if continued long enough, starving, England. But the work of wisdom had proceeded too far. The industrial parliament had secured the faith of the nation, and there was a decidedly favor-

able reaction on the part of the miners to the action of the government in starting a searching investigation of every fact about the digging and disposition of coal. Against a quarter of a million miners who continue to work, there are now about 60,000 now on strike, and they are confined to the most radical section of "Radical Wales."

#### TENDENCIES IN THE UNITED STATES

As compared with the United States conditions in the past in England have been less favorable to the British worker and the British worker has, by the force of circumstances, a more deep-seated feeling of solidarity. During recent years in Great Britain education in economics has spread among the workers through a system of so-called tutorial classes, meeting one night a week. Leaders, organizers, secretaries, and committeemen have been developed in surprisingly large numbers. The workers are organized in greater proportion than the workers in the United States.

It is still the fact, however, that the outlook in the United States is for a close application of the British experience. Although the American Federation of Labor, and the old line labor leaders, have not deviated from their former fight for standards, the war has infused into the industrial life of the country a new conception of the relation of the worker to his job and to his employer, and *vice versa*. In what might be termed a bill of industrial rights, drawn up by representative labor leaders, employers and representatives of the public, acting under the name of the War Labor Conference Board during March, 1918, the government of relations between workers and employers in war industries was to be based upon certain guarantees and rights, among them concessions which had until that time been the provoking causes of innumerable strikes and disputes. The right of workers to organize without fear of loss of their jobs probably was the most significant of the clauses of the agreement. It also granted the same right to employers; established the eight-hour day as a principle of right if not actually to be applied universally; recognized and affirmed the right of every worker to a living wage—a wage sufficient to insure the subsistence of the worker and his family in health and reasonable comfort—and placed the toil of

women upon a plane of value equal to that of men by guaranteeing equal pay for equal work performed.

The War Labor Board was subsequently formed and proceeded to conciliate and arbitrate industrial controversies in accordance with these principles, and in the application of the principle of collective bargaining was forced to set up systems of bargaining which now seem to be the foundation for a general readjustment of American industrial life. In every case collective bargaining was granted as a right. Under the guidance of administrators assigned by the board, workers held shop and plant elections, chose committees from among their fellows, and these committees proceed to function as representatives of the whole group of workers in such matters as the fixing of wages, determination of hours, settlement of grievances, and conditions of employment. Under the stimulus of the action of this board, the principle of collective bargaining has been extended in an extraordinary way, and has been the occasion for the consideration and adoption of committee systems in many of the basic industries of the country.

Out of the war, and its consequent high costs of necessities, and out of the inspiration furnished by the workers of Great Britain, to say nothing of the thinking that the war has aroused in every man and woman, there has also developed in America a type of unrest that will not be allayed by the mere winning of increased wage rates, shorter hours. This fact has been made manifest in a variety of circumstances, not the least of which has been the formation of labor parties with constructive political programs in various industrial centers. Definitely, this is not significant as an indication of a labor revolt, but it is significant as an indication of a state of mind.

Above all other attempts to express the needs of the changing time in America up to date stands the program of the Roman Catholic War Council. This program, drawn by a committee of four bishops of the church, not alone encourages labor to resist wage reductions and advocates such steps as the establishment of coöperative stores to be owned by the working class, government competition with monopolies, a legal minimum wage, social insurance against illness, unemployment and old age and the taxation of child labor out of existence, but it also indorses the movement of labor to obtain a voice in the management of industry,

and, even goes so far as to declare that industry must somehow pass into the ownership of those who operate it, asserting that "the full possibilities of production will not be realized so long as a majority of the workers remain mere wage earners."

The capitalist, says the report and program, "must cultivate and strengthen within his mind the truth . . . that the laborer is a human being, not merely an instrument of production; and that the laborer's right to a decent livelihood is the first moral charge upon industry." And, further, a living wage is not necessarily the limit of the workers' just demands, in the opinion of the bishops, for "after all, a living wage is not necessarily the full measure of justice. . . . In a country as rich as ours, there are very few cases in which it is possible to prove that the worker is getting more than that to which he has a right if he were paid something in excess of this ethical minimum."

In the general tendency towards the adoption of collective bargaining in this country, however, lies the chief analogy to the English situation. Works committees will undoubtedly in time come under the control of organized labor. They will in turn be federated into district boards and into joint industrial councils covering the basic industries. These councils will in their turn be federated into a national industrial council or congress in which representatives of employers and employees will meet to discuss labor and industrial problems. As a matter of fact, at the present time a national industrial congress to consider measures of labor readjustment is being vigorously agitated.

#### THE SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR SITUATION

In the light of these events and tendencies the conclusion is irresistible that the great war which has just closed marks the beginning of a new and revolutionary era in its bearing upon industrial relations and conditions. The significance of the French Revolution of more than a hundred years ago was political. It marked the beginnings of political democracy. After a century's experience with political democracy the workers of the world seem to have reached the decision that political democracy without a corresponding measure of economic rights and freedom is a sham and a delusion. In one way or another, they are reach-



ing out for the means of adjustment of economic institutions to democratic ideals. They are seeking to gain this end both by a larger degree of control in the direct management of industry from within and by the coercion and direction of industry through political action. The effect by either method is towards industrial democracy. This is really the significant feature of the labor problem both nationally and internationally at the present time. The labor movement, while it is directly concerned with higher standards and better conditions, is no less indirectly striving towards the subordination of our industrial institutions to our political institutions and ideals. The international labor problem will hereafter consist in the development and adaptation to our political institutions of a system of industrial constitutionalism and judicialism. This will be brought about by the effort to realize industrial democracy.